

VZCZCXRO8412
PP RUEHAG RUEHBC RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW
RUEHROV
DE RUEHAH #1190/01 2530949
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 090949Z SEP 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1519
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 4280
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 2092
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 1957
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 2528
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001190

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN AND NEA/IR, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/09/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: UK CHARGE D'AFFAIRES BAFFLED BY TURKMEN OFFICIALS'
STANDOFFISHNESS

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The UK Charge d'Affaires in Ashgabat is puzzled by the reluctance of Turkmen government officials to contact or meet with him or members of the Embassy staff. In a meeting with emboff, he said that they avoid official meetings or briefings, and rarely attend social events when invited, a fact he attributes to a general fear of reprimand for getting too cozy with foreign officials. We are not as puzzled as our UK colleague. During the years of Niyazov's rule, Turkmen found that the nail that sticks up gets beaten down. There was no reward and frequently punishment for sticking out. Nevertheless, we continue to develop warm and productive relations with our Turkmen colleagues, as we invest the time. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In one of a series of introductory meetings with foreign diplomats stationed in Ashgabat, emboff met on September 5 with UK Charge d'Affaires George Scott. Scott himself has been in Ashgabat for seven months, and says that he has come to the conclusion that Turkmen officials are so fearful of any real contact with foreign diplomats (or foreigners, for that matter) that they shy away from most official and other gatherings. He added that the Turkmen seek technical and financial assistance from the UK in a number of areas, but they won't actually let anyone in on how things work to see how they can help. He said, "It's like a doctor being asked to treat a sick patient hidden behind a closed door, and told he must do so without even seeing or examining the patient." Anytime he attends meetings with any ministerial or other government entity in Ashgabat, the same MFA desk officer shows up at all the meetings to take notes. The desk officer reportedly never says a word, but listens and takes copious notes of everything being said.

13. (C) Scott offered several anecdotes that illustrate officials' essentially fearful attitude towards foreign contacts. He also said that a visiting Turkmen government minister in the UK oddly had no contact with the Turkmen Embassy while she was in London. Shirin Akhmedova, Director of the National Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, was invited to London by the UK government for a visit and consultations with the British government in July. During the visit, her hosts asked whether she would like to arrange

a dinner with the Turkmen ambassador and embassy staff, to which she replied that there was no purpose in such a get-together and that she had no plans to see them during her visit.

14. (C) The British Foreign office recently arranged for a Turkmen diplomat to attend a conference on Afghanistan at Oxford University. When the participant returned, Scott contacted him several times by phone and left messages inviting him to share his impressions of the trip and the conference with him. He got no response at all, and so decided to send him a letter. When the Turkmen diplomat heard that a letter might be on the way, he told an interlocutor, "No, no! Please tell him not to send a letter," out of fear that he will somehow be accused of working for the UK. He said he has also invited a senior MFA official several times to "come by for tea" at the UK Embassy, to no avail.

15. (C) Similarly, when Scott's predecessor at the Embassy was about to depart Post earlier this year, the British ambassador put on a farewell reception and invited a number of foreign diplomats and several Turkmen from the MFA. The invitations were delivered to the MFA but then were all returned to the Embassy with a letter requesting a diplomatic note giving more information about the purpose of the gathering and formally requesting the attendance of the Turkmen diplomats.

16. (C) Scott said that he regularly rides public transportation in Ashgabat and walks to and from work. He

ASHGABAT 00001190 002 OF 002

finds that he frequently passes the same people on the street each morning, and whereas people in other places might begin to greet passersby or acknowledge a familiar face, the Turkmen always look away. He chalks this up to being a holdover of the control and isolation that the government exercised during both the Soviet and Niyazov eras.

17. (C) COMMENT: During the years of Niyazov's rule, Turkmen found that the nail that sticks up gets beaten down. There was no reward and frequently punishment for sticking out. Therefore, innovation is almost unheard of and people ask not to be named in invitations to participate in foreign seminars or training programs, no matter how much they want to go. That said, we have had official Turkmen (although not many) show up at our receptions. And while we would not expect our contacts to show up at a Saturday afternoon barbecue, the Embassy continues to develop warm and productive relations with our Turkmen colleagues, as we invest the time. END COMMENT.
CURRAN